



LUNDI MATIN 2019-01-06

SUDAN, REVOLUTION TIL THE END

DOCUMENTATION, NONPOLITICS RIOT, RIOTS, SUDAN

The following is an international French-language report-back published by Lundi Matin on January 3rd, 2019. What follows is our translation.

Two years ago we published an interview with a Sudanese exilé who took part in the insurrectionary movements in the Sudan between 2013 and 2016. Ever since repression has not stopped and many Sudanese have chosen exile, notably in Europe via Libya and the Mediterranean sea. These days, the movement demanding the fall of the regime has taken off once again across all the cities in the country.

As this recounting of the events since mid-December attests, the Sudanese situation never was exotic, but rather we can see that it resonates more than ever with the situation that now has taken place for two months in France.

Since Friday, Dec. 14th the Sudanese people have risen up against the dictatorship of General Omar El-Bashir and his radical Islamist regime. The catalyst: a shortage of flour, gasoline and cash, accompanied by a fall in the value of currency, an inflation of over 70% (where the price of bread has tripled in a few days in several cities). But this is not the principal object of revolt. The economic and political situation has deteriorated over the last few years: on one side, poverty is more and more widespread while the bourgeoisie of the regime grows rich, and on the other, parliament seeks to modify the constitution to allow Omar El-Bashir to be present in the 2020 elections after 31 years in power. The revolt has been felt across the country for a few months now. The government militias (Rapid Special Force, who notably were responsible for mass murder at Darfur) conducted raids in October in the periphery neighborhoods of Khartoum, beating young people, shaving their heads, to remind them that any desire to revolt will be repressed with violence.

RECOUNTING THE START OF A REVOLUTION

But this time the anger has taken off, and for good. Thousands of people have taken to the streets, in cities across the country.

On the 14th [of Dec.] protests were still rather weak. But the following Wednesday, in the worker and industrial city of Atbara, high school and university students took to the streets and overwhelmed the police. During the day's events, the seat of the National

Congress Party, that of Omar El-Bashir, was burned down. All of the police were forced to flee the city since the army took the side of people. High school and university students were in even stronger numbers at Khartoum the next day: Thursday, they got out onto the streets, blockaded the universities and certain major road axes in the capital. Similarly, at Qadaref, in the east of the country, the protests were growing in number. The movement then was on: on Friday, after prayer ("*jumaat alghaddab*": Friday of rage) the streets of the capital, and numerous other cities, were inundated by protesters.

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The following Saturday and Sunday, the opposition movement took over football stadiums. Starting Saturday evening, the supporters of the Al Hilal [football] team protested during the match. The following day, the government hesitated to call off the following Al Hilal match, since this canceling of the game would amount to an acknowledgment of the opposition movement, it then preferred to fill the stadium with "Kizan" ("men who defend or work for the regime"). Likewise, at Al-Gezira, a province in the south of the country, El-Bashir went to visit an exposition, and then calls for protests were made in the city of Wad Madani (capital of this province). The night before, activists had set ablaze a part of the exposition. This act was strongly symbolic since the exposition cost more than \$100,000, while the population of Gezira still remains in poverty. Many of them were arrested. During the opening of the exposition, they brought out Kizan and schoolchildren to greet the arrival of the dictator, and to show that all is well, that everyone is with him. During his speech, live on television, several voices in the crowd rose up to denounce the massacres perpetrated by the regime ("*iasqut iasqut hukma al askir*": "let it fall, let it fall, the military government") and to affirm the refusal to welcome criminals. The TV station cut the live feed and put on another show. Al-Bashir had to continue his speech behind closed-doors and surrounded by his supporters. His visit was cut-short and he quickly returned to Khartoum. At this moment, all the cities in the country entered into revolt. Wednesday the 25th [of Dec.] a call was made by unions and opposition parties to protest across the country, and to notably gather in the city-center of Khartoum and march to the presidential palace. Thousands of people came out into the streets. The regime tried to stop the gathering from moving by blocking streets leading to the city-center and placing snipers atop buildings.

As soon as the marches formed, they were dispersed by tear gas and by live ammunition rounds, mass arrests, and beatings. The center of Khartoum had thus become, through the evening, a macabre game of cat and mouse which resulted in multiple attempts to reach the palace, which ultimately were in vain. That said, this day was pivotal for the movement, firstly because the unions have entered the struggle and secondly because the movement has reached such a magnitude that many people took the streets which have never done so before.

Wednesday and Thursday, only a few protests took place in the smaller cities and in the universities. But people were preparing for Friday. The number of killed grew, this Friday has been baptized as "Friday of the martyrs" ("*jumaat al-shouhada*"). On this day, all cities were in revolt but the agents of repression halted the people from coming out in as strong of numbers as on Thursday. But this was but a preparation for the protest on Monday, the 31st [of Dec.], a new day of protest called by the unions which brought out a lot of people.

THE FACE OF THE MOVEMENT

If the movement kicked off due to economic and social problems, it is now above all a political revolt. The main slogan, repeated by all marches, from the beginning has been "the people want the fall of the regime" or "freedom, peace, justice and revolution is the choice of the people." This is because, in reality, the cause of the uprising are deeper than the just the sudden rise in prices [of foodstuffs]. Corruption has hit an all-time high: the security forces which hold the reigns of power divert most public money to their own ends, while leaving the rest of people in poverty. Like the giant new club now being built for the NISS (National Intelligence Security Service). In short, the regime continues to strengthen itself, mobilizing all resources to this end: thus, the security budget is higher than that of health and education combines. Since this policy did not just come about yesterday, the social consequences felt today have been heavy.

2

Since the beginning of the regime war has continued without end. First war with the Republic of South Sudan, which voted for its independence in 2011, with which conflict (and notably the resources for this conflict) has still not yet come to an end. Later war with Darfur, with Nil Bleu, South Kordofan [province of Sudan] and in the east of the country..

The discriminated and isolated categories of the population, like the people of Darfur and the Nuba, are even more quick to revolt against the regime which wages war on their homelands.

Thus, for the Sudanese people today in revolt, the economic and social problems cannot be solved by the regime: the way to find a solution is byway of the fall of the regime ("*tasqut bes*", "the fall or nothing"). Further, no opposition party has the strength to resist the regime. Their positions and strategies have been largely disavowed. At the moment the revolt began, negotiations were openly underway with the principal opposition parties at Addis Abbaba on the subject of the troubling political and economic situation in the country. Thus, these revolts were not the result of these parties, but rather a spontaneous reply that have taken on a wider scope, and based on a common feeling: the regime is the origin of the ills of the country.

One of the trademarks of the start of the movement is the fact that its start was essentially thanks to the provincial cities (notably

those in the north) and not the capital itself. Notably, Atbara is a historically revolutionary bastion and has served as a springboard for the movement that spread very quickly throughout the country, thus breaking the isolation of sporadic protests which had taken place until then. Another trademark has been the fact that different fringe of society (university and high school students; workers from different sectors; residents of different cities; but also unions, NGOs and different social classes) found themselves together in the revolt. Social networks has played an essential role in breaking through the counter-information disseminated by the media which sought to stifle dissident voices.

Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp have also allowed people to coordinate themselves (notably thanks to the hashtag #moudoun_essoudan_tantafidd, #SudaneseCitiesRevolt). The images and video of the protests all over the country have been seen all over the world, which allowed the protest movement to spread...

Further, the attempts by the government to separate the different categories of the [Sudanese] population have been shattered with these new means of communication. We notably recall the bloody repression against Darfuri students which consequently set off a large solidarity movement expressing itself during protests and in social networks: *"jalounssouri almaghroor, koulou albalad darfour"*, "the racist is arrogant, the whole country is Darfur" (which is a subtle nod to Al-Bashir).

In light of old racist ethnic divisions within Sudanese society, protesters have attempted to redefine the old fracture lines within society: there are those who are with the regime (the Kizan) and those who are against the regime (the Sudanese people). We see arise the desire to cut with the old political game led by the government, to then redefine the political field in a new way.

Likewise, many young people, men and women, took to the streets, some for the first time in their lives, to express their anger, in large cities but also in smaller villages – and not just in urban centers. Besides the high school and university students who have protests, there have also been many children. One of them, Shaoqi Assadiq, 12 years old, was shot dead in Al-Gezira province. The picture of the child demonstrating in the streets was widely relayed and he became a symbol of the uprising.

3

Unions took a long time to enter the movement, and they struggle to rally their troops, though they played an important role in calling for protests on Dec. 25th and 31st. They attempted some strikes which were relatively not very followed through. Further, the opposition parties have trailed behind, even though they have also been the target of repression (some of their leaders have been arrested).

REPRESSION

Faced with this movement the government was initially in denial, while repressing the protests. Faced with the fraternization of the many regular army troops with people in revolt in provincial cities (such as at Atbara), the regime relied on the riot police, the Janjaweed militias (those who went to war and committed massacres at Darfur), security forces (NISS), "the popular army" (Kizan civilians armed by the government) and private militias hired by the local pro-regime bourgeoisie.

During protests, the deployment of armed repression has been staggering: snipers atop buildings, constant use of tear gas, regular use of live ammunition, aiming for people's heads. Today we count some 40 deaths across the country. Some bodies are found in the Nile, such as a student of literature at the University of Khartoum, Abderahman Asadiq. Protesters who are captured are beaten on the street and are often carried off. There are several hundred people gone missing. Very often nothing more is heard from them. The mutilations and injuries are incalculable.

4

A state of emergency has been decreed in almost all cities: the armed forces occupy all urban spaces; universities and schools have been closed; university students kicked out of dorms; and a curfew has been enacted in many cities like Atbara and Khartoum. Some people have been arrested in their homes, raids were carried out during the protests, with sometimes up to 200 people gone missing from one place. Houses have been attacked as protesters took refuge. Journalists have been arrested, newspapers forced to close. The internet has been cut-off several times in the country – notably to put a halt to use of social networks.

The regime has found some strong support like that of the emir of Qatar, Ben Khalifa Al Thani, who is notably the owner of the television network Al-Jazeera. The few times the network has covered the protests, it has only showed those protests which do not call into question the regime (which only speak of economic demands). Broadly, the media has been gagged by the State to silence what is happening.

While activists are killed just 100 meters from the headquarters of television network, these networks would rather broadcast music programs. In response to the serious lack of media coverage, at the level of Sudan and across the world, protests have cried out with the slogan: *"attalqah ma bitaktul, biktul sukat azol"* ("It is not the bullet that kills, it is silence that kills").

5

State propaganda essentially consists of not only silencing, but also dividing. The government has arrested Darfuri university

students which they accuse of fomenting the revolt and of belonging to an armed group at Darfur, the LMS (Liberation Movement of Sudan). An image of a handcuffed student, with weapons in front of them, was used to say that they were responsible for killing protesters, as a means to increase anger. This is where the population's response to State racism came in support of the Darfurians. Omar El-Bashir has spoken several times on television to address the situation. The first time he told Wad Madani that the protesters were traitors and thieves, and that Israel was behind these movements. The second time took place on Dec. 30th : Omar El-Bashir instrumentalized some Koranic suras and Hadith passages to justify the deaths of the protesters. There is thus now a willingness to kill and this came to fruition on Dec. 31st where the number of dead had been higher than usual.

SOLIDARITY

We cannot predict how this movement will end, if revolution will be achieved, if the revolt will be snuffed out or if a coup d'etat will put an end to any protest. In the face of any attempts of the State to break the cohesion created during the struggle, the people have affirmed their unity and support, without failure, for the victims of State racism. But it also in the neighborhoods where elders have helped the youth in revolt; where men and women are fighting hand-in-hand against repression; where doors open to those chased by police squadrons; where doctors are arrested for rescuing injured protesters; where soldiers join the protests and refuse to fire on the people, or in some cities even protect people from police violence... Solidarity is also international since [Sudanese] exilées around the world have protested in almost every Western capital to support their fellow compatriots in struggle. They demand a stop to any collaboration with the regime of Khartoum. They relay the voices of those far away and raise medical funds sorely needed by those who have been injured.

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